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SUBJ/PUBLIC AFFAIRS-NAVAL SERVICE MEDICAL NEWS (NSMN)
(95-GULF VETS)//
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RMKS/1. THIS SERVICE IS FOR GENERAL DISTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION AND NEWS OF INTEREST TO NAVY AND MARINE CORPS MEMBERS, CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES, FAMILY MEMBERS AND RETIRED BENEFICIARIES OF NAVY MEDICINE. MAXIMUM AND TIMELY REDISTRIBUTION OR FURTHER REPRODUCTION AND USE BY ACTION ADDRESSEES IS ENCOURAGED. THIS MESSAGE HAS BEEN COORDINATED WITH THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS (CMC). THE COMMANDANT HAS AUTHORIZED TRANSMISSION TO MARINE CORPS ACTIVITIES.

2. HEADLINES IN THIS SPECIAL PERSIAN GULF WAR VETERANS ISSUE:
(950086)-President Expands Commitment to Persian Gulf Vets
(950087)-VA Launches Hotline for Gulf Vets
(950088)-Persian Gulf Veteran Receives Compensation
(950089)-VA 1-800 Numbers

HEADLINE: President Expands Commitment to Persian Gulf Vets
NWSA Washington (NSMN) -- "With strong support from President Clinton, DOD has launched an expansion of its multimillion dollar Persian Gulf research and care effort," said Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs Dr. Stephen Joseph on 9 March.

"For months, DOD has been working closely with the White House, as well as with the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Health and Human Services, on what more we can do for our troops. This joint effort has resulted in the opening of two specialized care centers, \$10 million more in research and the President's Persian Gulf Advisory Committee. But more is needed. And more DOD initiatives are being developed for addressing the concerns of Persian Gulf veterans and their families."

Building on the care already being provided in the Comprehensive Clinical Evaluation Program (CCEP), the department is launching two specialized care centers whose major focus will be on diagnosing and treating those illnesses which are ill-defined or might have a unique relationship to the Persian Gulf experience. Going beyond the research already being conducted by the department, the department is funding an additional \$10 million in research for FY95 based on recommendations from the Persian Gulf Coordinating Board.

At least \$5 million of these research funds will go to

competitively bid, externally peer reviewed research. Very importantly, the department will be providing support to the President's Persian Gulf Advisory Committee announced 6 March.

"As of February 25th, our CCEP has completed work on more than 2,000 Gulf War troops, double the number from our earlier report in December," Joseph said. "Our findings, consistent with earlier data, show no unique Persian Gulf illnesses affecting significant numbers of our troops. Further, our studies still indicate that more than 90 percent of our troops returned from the Gulf War healthy. But we are not done. There are still Persian Gulf veterans suffering for whom we have no final answers and for whom we must press for answers."

Already the department is working with the more than 15,000 Persian Gulf veterans and their family members who have registered their concerns.

Thousands of troops have been diagnosed and treated already; thousands more will be cared for in the months ahead. At the same time care is being provided, the department is funding more research on Persian Gulf troops' illnesses and their causes.

SUBHEAD: Research Initiatives on Illness and Causes

-- DOD is engaged in a variety of joint research studies with Veterans Affairs and Health and Human Services. Among these are:

-- \$10 million of additional Persian Gulf-related research, of which at least \$5 million will be competitively bid, externally peer reviewed research on epidemiology studies, clinical care and pyridostigmine.

-- Examination of morbidity and mortality rates of Gulf War veterans (Naval Health Research Center).

-- Comparison of birth defects in a group of Persian Gulf veterans with a non-deployed group.

-- Studies to evaluate what happens when both the investigational drug, pyridostigmine bromide, and other chemical agents such as insecticides are used together.

-- Additionally, male/female differential tolerance to pyridostigmine is being evaluated.

-- Kuwaiti Oil Fire Health Risk Assessment: Characterization of health risks to DOD troops and personnel exposed to smoke from oil fires primarily based on air sampling near burning oil well fires. Using standard Environmental Protection Agency risk assessment methodology, the potential for significant long-term effects was determined to be minimal.

-- Results for several of these studies are expected to be reported this year.

SUBHEAD: Continuing Commitment to Care

-- Findings from the CCEP provide no evidence for a single or unique Persian Gulf illness.

-- Comparing the latest CCEP results to December's results, the distribution of the major diagnoses is as follows:

-- Mental disorders as of February, 21.0 percent; as of December, 23.9 percent;

-- Musculoskeletal/connective complaints as of February,

15.5 percent; as of December, 15.9 percent; and

-- Symptoms, signs and other ill-defined conditions as of February, 16.1 percent; as of December, 14.0 percent.

-- Begun on 7 June 1994, the CCEP provides in-depth medical evaluations for DOD beneficiaries who are experiencing illnesses which may be related to their service in the Persian Gulf.

-- As of 24 February 1995, more than 15,000 have enrolled in the Department of Defense Registry; 12,031 are participating in the medical evaluations and, of these, 4,678 have completed the examination and 2,074 have had their records validated and entered into the CCEP database.

-- DOD is establishing Specialized Care Centers (SCCs) in Washington, D.C. and San Antonio. The SCCs will use multidisciplinary teams to review cases, confirm diagnoses and provide intensive programs, including those oriented at improving functional status of patients with symptoms of pain and fatigue.

-- DOD is enhancing its capabilities to protect the health of military personnel during future deployments with an emphasis on pre-deployment education, health hazards assessments in theater, pre- and post-deployment health screening and medical surveillance.

Story from Navy Wire Service, 13 March 1995

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HEADLINE: VA Launches Hotline for Gulf Vets

VA Washington (NSMN) -- The Department of Veterans Affairs recently established a toll-free number to inform Persian Gulf War veterans and their families of available medical care and other benefits. The toll-free information line is 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387). Hearing impaired vets can call TDD 1-800-829-4833.

"We want Persian Gulf veterans to know VA will take every initiative necessary to let them know how we can help them," Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jessie Brown said. "The toll-free number gives them quick access to timely information."

The helpline, headquartered at a new Persian Gulf Information Center at the St. Louis VA Regional Office, is staffed with Persian Gulf War benefits specialists who are available weekdays from 0730 to 2030 (CT). The helpline includes a series of recorded messages that allows callers to obtain information 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The helpline is part of a comprehensive outreach program established to assist Gulf veterans. The Veterans Benefits Act of 1994, which President Clinton signed into law on 2 November 1994, called for the helpline and a newsletter with information on research on illnesses of Persian Gulf veterans and their families, and on benefits available through VA. Such a newsletter was begun by VA in 1992, called "Persian Gulf Review," and is distributed to all veterans on their Persian Gulf Registry. Currently, more than 39,000 veterans are on the registry, which VA established in 1992 to identify patterns of illnesses among Gulf veterans.

VA also is providing information on VA benefits, medical care and research, including assistance for Persian Gulf

veterans, on an electronic bulletin board system. Callers with a personal computer, a modem and a communications package can access VA ONLINE. The toll-free number for the bulletin board is 1-800-US1-VETS (1-800-871-8387).

Outreach is also being conducted through special mailings to Persian Gulf Registry members. VA began these mailings with a recent letter from Brown informing veterans that VA will review claims previously filed by those who believed they were exposed to an environmental hazard while serving in the Persian Gulf theater. The letter advised veterans who have not filed claims to do so if they believe they are entitled to benefits.

VA conducts a number of benefit briefings with active duty personnel, Reservists and National Guard members. Information about the new helpline and the medical services and benefits available to Persian Gulf veterans is discussed in these briefings, including those conducted in support of the Transition Assistant Program (TAP), which VA jointly sponsors with the Departments of Defense and Labor to assist separating service members in making a smooth transition to civilian life.

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HEADLINE: Persian Gulf Veteran Receives Compensation

THE WHITE HOUSE, Washington (NSMN) -- The President met in the Oval Office 22 February with Michael T. Sills of Villa Park, IL, one of the first recipients of a compensation check awarded to Persian Gulf veterans under a new law signed by President Clinton in November. The law provides compensation for Gulf veterans with chronic disabilities resulting from undiagnosed illnesses. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jesse Brown presented the check to Sills, an Air Force veteran, who served in the Air National Guard in the war theater.

"Today, the country takes a long-overdue step to recognize the sacrifices of these Persian Gulf veterans," the President said. "We are taking an unprecedented approach to assisting these veterans by providing compensation for conditions that have defied conventional diagnoses. We encourage any Persian Gulf veteran who is sick to file a claim and we will automatically reopen previously denied claims as a result of this new law."

Approximately 700,000 men and women were deployed to the Gulf in the year following the Desert Shield mobilization, and more than 364,000 have left active duty and become eligible for certain veterans programs. The prevalence of undiagnosed illnesses among Gulf veterans is uncertain, but an ambitious series of medical research studies is in progress to clarify health effects of Gulf service. DOD, HHS and VA are working together to develop research initiatives which are designed to provide information that will give veterans the good health and peace of mind they deserve.

"I felt that we could not wait on science. For some Persian Gulf veterans like Michael Sills, medical science does not have answers today," the President said, "but we must not and will not give up."

While federal agencies have responded with medical care, research and now compensation, it is critical that veterans come

forward for help. Both VA and DOD are providing specialized examinations of Gulf veterans who have health problems or concerns. In addition, both departments are operating toll-free information centers to answer questions and help veterans find needed health care or other services (VA, 1-800-PGW-VETS; DOD, 1-800-796-9699).

"Michael Sills and veterans like him who served their country honorably have earned our gratitude," said the President. "And when they are sick, we must do what is right."

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HEADLINE: VA 1-800 Numbers

BUMED Washington (NSMN) -- Toll-free 1-800 numbers are a marvelous service offered by a variety of agencies. In addition to the DOD Persian Gulf Veterans hotline, 1-800-796-9699, and Department of Veterans Affairs' recently announced 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387) number, VA has the following numbers:

-- 1-800-827-1000: Callers to this number are connected to the nearest VA regional office serving the area from which their call originates during normal business hours.

-- 1-800-US1-VETS (1-800-871-8387): VA ONLINE (electronic bulletin board system)

-- 1-800-733-8387: CHAMPVA

-- 1-800-827-0365: Radiation Helpline

-- 1-800-669-8477: Veterans Life Insurance Phone Section

-- 1-800-827-0648: VA National Collection Center

-- 1-800-697-6947: VA's National Cemetery System's Office of Memorial Programs.

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3. ADDRESSEES ARE ENCOURAGED TO SUBMIT INFORMATION AND NEWS ITEMS OF MEDICAL DEPARTMENT OR BENEFICIARY INTEREST (IN STORY FORMAT) BY TELEPHONE, FAX OR E-MAIL TO BUMED, ATTN: EDITOR, NAVAL SERVICE MEDICAL NEWS (MED 00P2). TELEPHONE (202) 653-0793, DSN 294-0793. FAX (202) 653-0086, DSN 294-0086. E-MAIL NMCOENL@BUMED10.MED.NAVY.MIL//

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